

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 002067

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/27/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MASS](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [CO](#) [SP](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: AZNAR VISITS COLOMBIA

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood. Reasons: 1.5 B & D.

-----  
Solidarity  
-----

11. (U) Spanish President Jose Maria Aznar came to Colombia to express his solidarity with President Alvaro Uribe's fight against terrorism and to underscore Spanish assistance to Colombia. He also addressed a forum on Democracy and Development in Latin America, organized by the International Foundation for Freedom and chaired by Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa. During the two-day visit to Cartagena, Aznar expressed support for President Uribe's Democratic Security Strategy and noted that both countries were effectively fighting terrorism. Aznar said he would urge the European Union to place Colombia's National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas on the EU's terrorist list.

-----  
Development Assistance  
-----

12. (U) Speaking from a 17th Century convent restored with Spanish assistance, Aznar noted that Spain is Europe's top donor to Colombia. At a joint press conference, Uribe announced that Spain's Development Assistance Fund would finance a USD 62 million electrification project along Colombia's impoverished Pacific coast, along with other development assistance. Aznar added that Colombia receives more in micro-credit programs than any other country in Latin America. Responding to a question about Spanish tourism in Colombia, he reiterated the security theme, stating that tourism would increase as terrorism is reduced.

-----  
Military Assistance and Sales  
-----

13. (U) Aznar and Uribe announced the donation of two Caza aircraft to be used for military transport. The two turned aside questions about the GOC Air Force's refusal to accept an earlier offer of Mirage jets and the possible donation of tanks. Subsequently, GOC MINDEF Jorge Uribe announced the imminent purchase of approximately 40 used AMX-30 tanks from Spain. The MINDEF said that the army would deploy the tanks exclusively to fight internal narco-terrorism in the non-border states of Bolivar, Cordoba, Sucre, Atlantico, and Magdalena. Senator Rafael Pardo, a former MINDEF, was quick to criticize the decision, arguing that the tanks were inappropriate for fighting any internal or external enemy other than Venezuela. He concluded that the purchase would create new economic, political, and military problems without solving existing ones.

-----  
Other Tough Questions  
-----

14. (U) Aznar responded vaguely to questions about regularizing the status of undocumented Colombians in Spain. When asked if a Spanish extradition order for Colombian paramilitary commander Carlos Castano would derail the peace process, Aznar noted that Spain had an independent judiciary. He declined to discuss his post-presidency plans. Stating that the reelection of Argentina's Menem, Peru's Fujimori, Brazil's Cardozo, and potentially Venezuela's Hugo Chavez had not turned out well, a reporter asked Uribe if a constitutional change that would permit his reelection was ethical. Uribe responded that reelection was a matter for the congress and that constitutional matters were also a matter of public opinion (Note: At 80 per cent, Uribe's public approval is the highest in Latin America. End note).

-----  
COMMENT  
-----

15. (C) The tank purchase is "soft" in that the numbers still range between 32 and 46 units. A Colombian military team is currently inspecting the available used tanks in Spain. The six million USD cost is merely the maximum funding available and must also cover the training package and maintenance, and possibly transport. Essentially, the cost per vehicle will be so low as to be a virtual gift from Spain. The effective

use of a 36 ton tank, costly to maintain and unable to cross many of Colombia's rural bridges, is not in road security, but in engaging other tanks. Armored wheeled vehicles would be a better option. The advantage of this deal may be more to demonstrate military assistance from a European country than for military advantage.

WOOD